



Plant Materials Program

Conservation Plant Releases

Plants offer a natural solution for addressing many of our conservation challenges. From wildfire restoration and invasive species control to erosion prevention and nutrient filtering, plants can help protect our natural resources and, when needed, help the landscape heal.

The Plant Materials Program, administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), cooperates with a variety of public and private conservation partners to select and produce improved plants for conservation. The program also develops and transfers the state-of-the-art technology necessary for successful conservation plantings that prevent soil erosion and improve air and water quality.



For over 60 years, Plant Materials Centers and Plant Materials Specialists nationwide have selected and released more than 500 improved conservation plants. These plants went to work immediately on the nation's most critical resource issues and it is estimated that, in any given year, enough seed from the program's plant releases is produced to plant 3.7 million acres, or an area three times the size of the state of Delaware.

Through conservation plant releases, the program:

- ❖ Focuses on using native plants as a natural way to solve conservation problems and protect ecosystems.
- ❖ Collects, selects, and produces a broad range of species, including grasses, legumes, forbs, wildflowers, trees, and shrubs.
- ❖ Provides plant materials and new technology for a number of national conservation initiatives, including 2002 Farm Bill programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).



Plant Materials Program releases are planted on an array of sites—from flat grazing land to steep streambanks, from coastal areas to Rocky Mountain slopes. They repair damage from wildfire, floods, noxious weeds, drought, timber harvesting, and mining. They also beautify highways and recreation areas, help agricultural producers filter crop water runoff, and assist ranchers in improving grazing production. Most of all, plants—no matter where they are planted—help prevent soil erosion. Saved soil means more productive cropland, cleaner water, and improved habitat for wildlife.

Distribution of Seed and Economic Impacts

After Plant Materials Centers distribute new releases to commercial nurseries or seed growers, those growers produce large amounts of seed for sale to landowners and land managers. Sales of this seed represent a significant economic value to growers, distributors, and retailers.

Commercial Production of Plant Releases in 2001

Type	Amount	Value
Foundation Seed	532,970 lbs.	\$460,690
Certified Seed	10,130,407 lbs.	\$51,508,231
Common Seed	8,675,177 lbs.	\$31,982,063
All Plants	22,661,804 ea.	\$9,938,446
Total Value		\$93,889,430



Tusas Germplasm bottlebrush squirreltail, a 2001 release used for wildfire rehabilitation in the Southwest.

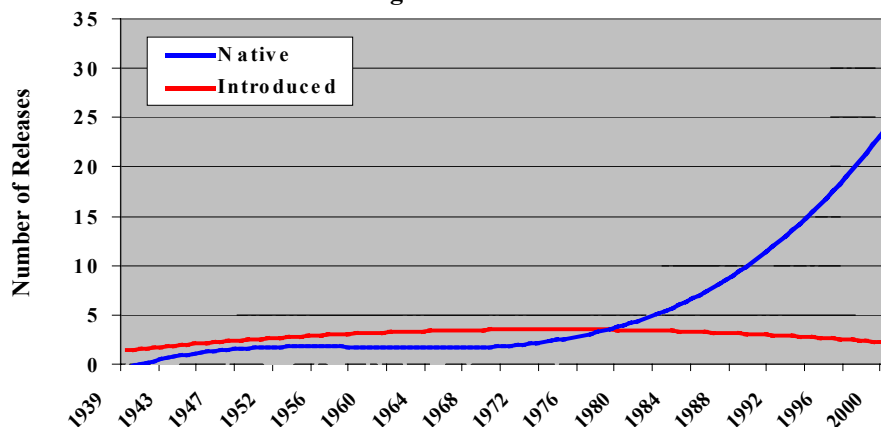


Changes and Trends in Plant Materials Program Releases

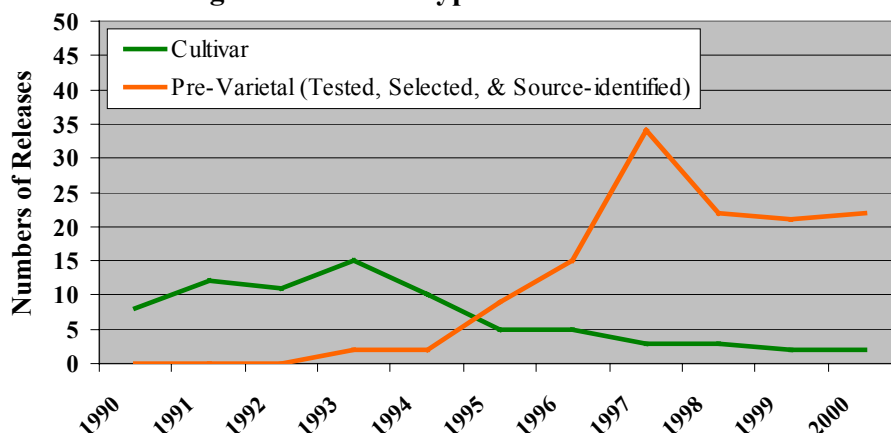
Traditionally, the program has focused attention on long-term cultivar selection of both native and introduced species. The current importance of delivering plants to commercial growers sooner, the desire for broader-based germplasm, and the need for more native materials have brought about significant changes in the program.

Plant Materials Centers now focus their efforts almost entirely on native species and use pre-varietal releases (tested, selected, and source-identified release types) to get releases to the end user quickly and efficiently.

Trends in the Origin of Plant Materials Releases



Changes in Release Types Over the Last 10 Years



For more information, visit <http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov> and <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

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